17.X.4

THE

CIRCULAR LETTER

FROM THE

MINISTERS and MESSENGERS

OF THE

Baptift Congregational Churches,

Statedly meeting at *Alcester*, Warwickshire; *Bourton-on-the-Water*, *Campden*, and *Fairford*, Gloucestershire; *Oxford*, *Burford*, *Chipping Norton*, and *Coat*, Oxfordshire; and *Shipston-upon-Stower*, Worcestershire:

Receiving the scriptures of the Old and New Testament as their only guide, in faith and practice; and thence deriving their belief in the important doctrines of Three equal Persons in the divine Essence,—Eternal and personal Election,— Original Sin,— Particular Redemption,— Free Justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ,—Efficacious grace in Regeneration,—The final Perseverance of Believers,—The Resurrection of the dead,—The last Judgment,—The everlasting punishment of the Impenitent, and happiness of the Righteous:

Assembled at COAT, May 19 & 20, 1807:

TO THE SEVERAL CHRISTIAN SOCIETIES WHICH THEY REPRESENT.

DEAR BRETHREN,

THE intelligence communicated to us by the Societies which we represent, has excited anew our sorrows and our joys. The past year has been, to many of us a season of affliction. One of our churches has been deprived, by death, of a highly beloved Pastor, whose exemplary piety and incessant labours for God, had rendered his life an important blessing to the neighbourhood in which he resided. Another church has lost a valuable deacon, who had been greatly and deservedly esteemed on account of his activity and

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extensive usefulness in the Redeemer's cause. You will perceive by our annual statement that we have lost a considerable number of our members, and we learn that still a larger proportion of hearers has been cut off by the stroke of death. These circumstances, brethren, ought deeply to affect us. We sympathize with surviving friends, and desire to await with increased spirituality and watchfulness the awful summons which each of us must speedily receive. We gratefully acknowledge that, though affliction has abounded, our joys also have been abundant. The state of the churches is, on the whole, very prosperous. In all of them peace and harmony reign. To most of them considerable additions have been made, and in several instances we are assured the prospect is highly encouraging. In the religious exercises of our annual assembly, we have experienced we trust gracious tokens of the divine presence; and have said as with one voice, *It is good to be here.*

Prompted by an anxious solicitude for your best interests, we now entreat your serious attention to a few considerations on CHRISTIAN CONVERSATION. You will readily agree with us, that it is a subject of great importance, and well meriting our attention as individuals, families, and churches. The tongue of the ungodly man is called in scripture *a scourge**, inflicting on the unoffending the severest lashes, — *a sharp sword*†, making the most painful wounds, cutting asunder the tenderest bonds,— *an arrow*‡, piercing the harmless, the distant victim,— *a burning coal* ‖, consuming every thing around it,— *a viper*¶, biting the heel of the unsuspicious traveller, and pouring poison into his veins. On the contrary, the tongue of the godly man is called *his glory***,— being employed in giving utterance to the gratitude of the heart,— *choice silver*§, an object at once beautiful and valuable,— *a tree of life* ‖*, producing a sweet variety of wholesome and delicious fruits. There are many who are called christians, whose conversation is altogether unchristian,— such persons utter unclean and filthy language, and on this account are expressly excluded from the kingdom of Christ and of God; — they pour forth torrents of profanity, these are they whom the Judge of the whole earth has solemnly declared *he will not hold guiltless.* We do not now address such characters as these; though we cannot help remarking, that whatever such persons may

*Job v, 21. † Ps. lvii, 4. ‡ Ps. cxx, 4. ‖ Rom. iii, 13. ¶ Ps. cxl, 3. ** Ps. lvii, 8; xxx, 12. xvi, 9. § Prov. x, 20. ‖* Prov. xv, 4.

profess, it is by a 'mischievous perversion of language that they are called christians.'

Our address is to you, our fellow servants in Christ Jesus. You are not only distinguished by the christian name, but profess to *know the grace of God in truth.* You acknowledge, that you owe a conscientious regard to every declaration of the sacred volume; if you would be consistent professors, then, you will practically regard us when we say, *Let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ; as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.* You profess to be expecting a period *when the heavens shall flee away, and the earth be burnt up;* when you shall stand in the awful presence of the *Judge of the whole earth,* and receive individually from him a fulfilment of the declaration, *By thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. Seeing then ye look for such things, what manner of persons ought ye to be, in all conversation and godliness.*

Faithfulness obliges us to say, that there are many things in the conversation of the serious professors of religion that are improper. Brethren, in this respect we are all more or less liable to err, and to act inconsistently with our repeated and solemn profession. Ye are among those *who are children of the light and of the day,* who by the sacred writers, are emphatically distinguished as wise men: our words therefore ought to be like gold, to be valuable, that they may benefit those around us; and weighty, that they may make deep impressions on the heart; and is this the case with the conversation of professors in general? is it commonly impressive, beneficial, and important? are there not individuals among you whose conversation is generally trifling? many companies of professing christians, who, 'as if in close committee on the sky,' make the varied changes of the weather the principle topic of conversation? amongst whom, the follies and fashions of the day are brought forward and applauded? by whom the history of one frivolous visit is detailed for the amusement of another? Is it then true, that you love to speak of the glorious Being whose grandeur and whose goodness are infinite? of the eternity to which you are hastening? of the account you have shortly to give? and of his compassions whose bosom was an overflowing ocean of love? alas! truth obliges us to say, that there are some who seldom

or never converse, even with their intimate friends, on such subjects as these; and that when they are occasionally introduced into company, they often silence many a voluble speaker, and make an awful pause in the conversation,— truth obliges us to say, that there are professors of religion whose conversation is so unprofitable and trifling, that a man of sense, not to say a christian, ought to refuse to lend his ears to them.—The excellent Janeway once admirably reproved a company of such triflers,—sitting down in the midst of them, as though he was reflecting on some profound subject, he took in short hand an accurate record of the sentences they uttered; after some time had elapsed, he read it to them, and as he finished reading it, solemnly asked them, 'If they were willing that such conversation as theirs had been should be written in the book of God.' A well informed man,* once told an intimate friend, that of every ten things which he knew, he had learnt nine from conversation; but might we not listen to the conversation of some professors of religion from one end of the year to the other, and learn nothing? might not some of them look back on almost every day, and exclaim, It has been lost! And what is so probable, as that, when the last day of the lives of such professors shall come, they will look back on the years they have been in the world, with hearts full of anguish, and say, they have all been lost! 'Words that are of no account,' a good man was accustomed to say, 'will turn to a very heavy account.' Brethren, we ought to be serious; and if we would be useful, consistent, and honourable christians, if we would be ready to meet our Lord, we shall be serious; we shall frequently speak of the great things of God's word, teaching them diligently to our children, *talking of them sitting in the house and walking by the way, lying down, and rising up.*

The Father of Mercies has kindly placed us all in the varied situations we fill, and has charged us to occupy till he shall come. Our interests in the present world are confessedly important; we must *look well to our flocks* and *be diligent to know the state of our herds;* we cannot but frequently converse about the things of time and sometimes make the necessary enquiries, *What shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?* but surely we ought not to forget, that this is not the only world in which we are to exist,—surely, those objects that are most important, ought to occupy a princi-

* Mons. Varillas. — vide Menagiana, vol. 1.

pal share of our conversation. Certainly, we ought to think and speak not only of these bodies, that are shortly to moulder in the dust, but of our spirits, that are to live for ever,—not only of the affection of our fellow mortals, but of his friendship, whose *love was stronger than death*,—not merely of creatures, but of the adorable Creator, not only of our houses, our lands and worldly interests, but of *the things that make for our peace*,— of the heaven that is prepared for the followers of the Lamb. Is it not, however, painfully evident, from the conversation of some professors, that they seldom recollect, that *they have here no continuing city; that the fashion of this world is passing away*. Does not the worldliness of their conversation justly make the reality of religion questionable?—is it not probable, that Jesus Christ would have said of such characters, They are none of mine, *they are of the world, and therefore speak they of the world*. Doubtless, it is not unreasonable or uncharitable, to suppose that if they were properly mindful of the immense importance of eternal realities, it would be more commonly evident from their intercourse with their fellow creatures, and especially with their fellow christians. Professing to be *born from above* our conversation ought to be heavenly; our affections ought to be *set on things above, and not on things on the earth*. If we had a large estate in a distant part of the world, of which we were shortly going to take possession, our hearts would be full of the subject; our tongues would never tire with the pleasing theme; rapture would animate our countenances, and joy sparkle in our eyes: and are we indeed going to everlasting mansions, to immortal crowns, eternally to enjoy the unclouded presence of the blessed God, and to exult beneath his smiles; and do we not delight to converse on the subject?—and are we not ravished with the prospect of such felicity? how unaccountable is this! how astonishing! that we can think of any thing else! that we can speak of any thing else! If on some foreign shore, we were unexpectedly to meet with some of our friends, England, our dear native country, would unquestionably be the great subject on which we should converse,—and is it possible, that we can habitually associate with those who are accompanying us to *the land flowing with milk and honey*, and our lips, made eloquent by the transporting theme, not pour forth some glowing description of this happy region? — and not attempt to tell, in immortal strains, the ardour of his love, who made the rich possession all our own, *without money and without price*? If it be, it is scarcely credible that we are going thither.

In judging of the real character of our fellow professors, it would certainly be wrong not to make all proper allowances for natural dispositions. The most superficial observer will readily acknowledge the propriety of the remark, that there are persons who are occasionally somewhat hasty, and speak unadvisedly with their lips, but who have evidently more religion, and walk more closely with God, than some who are almost uniformly meek and unmoved. Let it, however, never be forgotten, that we have no religion, unless we are ardently desirous of properly regulating our passions,—he who is generally passionate can never converse acceptably or usefully, such an one is so noisy, that he cannot hear any thing that may have a tendency to allay his fury; so talkative, that, to use an expression of one of the ancients, you would imagine, 'his ears had slipped into his tongue;' so proud, that he monopolizes the conversation, as though no one else had any thing to say worth speaking; let it be remembered, that *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* Meekness, like the gently falling dews, that fertilize the earth, and render it fruitful, is productive of every thing excellent; while passion, like the impetuous hurricane, that spreads ruin and devastation through a country, is commonly fatal and destructive. O that *the same mind may be in us which was in Christ Jesus!* May it be our ardent desire to manifest by our conversation, that we have *learnt of him who was meek and lowly of heart*,

It is abundantly evident that there is a Providence that governs the world. If we are christians indeed, we believe the assertion of Jesus Christ, that *the very hairs of our head are all numbered*; that all necessary things shall be given to his disciples in this world, and a kingdom of glory conferred on them in another: such declarations as these, from the lips of Him *who cannot lie*, may well satisfy them. Happy, beneath the smiles of their God, and in the assurances of his love, they may well exclaim, *The lines are fallen to us in pleasant places, we have a goodly heritage.* But alas! there are yet murmurers in the camp of Israel, who seldom open their mouths but to repine at their lot. How unbelieving are such characters, or they would not murmur: they would be humbly confident, that God would *withhold from them no good thing*; that though the eternal hills were removed he would *not take away his loving kindnesses or suffer his faithfulness to fail*:—how proud are they, or they would not murmur—for the

murmurer thinks that he merits something better than what he possesses;—how ungrateful are they, or they would not murmur,—they would see, that they have ten thousand reasons for thankfulness and not one for being discontented. If we are christians indeed, the promise, *I will not leave thee nor forsake thee*, is our rich possession, and Jehovah will certainly fulfil it to each of us. Yes, he will be to us an all-sufficient Benefactor, Conductor, and Saviour. A repining christian is a monstrous sight, and causes *the good ways of God to be evil spoken of*; for such an one practically declares by his murmurings, that God, and Christ, the riches of grace and of glory; the felicity of angels; blessedness, inconceivable, overflowing, eternal; that all this is not sufficient to make him happy; that all these objects, like the pleasures and enjoyments of the world, are vanity. O Brethren, if you would *shine as lights in the world*, if you would *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour*, listen to the exhortation of the Apostle, *let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have.*

It is certainly our duty to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the Saints*; but we ought also to recollect, that the religion we profess, is a religion of peace and love, and we may venture to affirm, that he is not very extensively acquainted with it, or with the spirit of its great Teacher, who has nothing to say respecting divine truth but what leads to wrangling and contention; and such there are among the professors of religion, as though God had revealed nothing but what was of a doubtful nature—as though the religion of Jesus were of no service but to furnish us with subjects for disputation, and qualify us for universal wranglers—as though it were declared, that the lips of a wise man commonly entered into contention instead of those of a fool. How painful the reflection, that any should employ the zeal, which ought to be employed in the great interests of religion, against those who truly love Christ, and from whom they differ only in some trifling particulars. An ancient historian tells us of two armies, that were engaged during a dark night in a severe conflict, and when the returning day poured its earliest beams on the field of battle, the combatants found, to their astonishment and dismay, that they belonged to the same nation, were engaged in the same cause, and that they had been slaughtering their brethren, their countrymen, and friends. Is it not to be feared, that many wrang-

ling professors will make, to their confusion, a discovery similarly terrible at the tribunal of God? O brethren! listen to the assertions of the wise man, *Only by pride cometh contention; as coals to burning coals, and as wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.* Obey, we intreat you, the exhortations of the Apostle, *do all things without murmurings and disputings, — withdraw yourselves* from those who are continually engaged in *perverse disputings, knowing* comparatively *nothing, but doting about questions, and strifes of words.* Let us not forget, that we profess to be disciples of the *Prince of Peace;* and to be consistent with our profession, our speech should *drop as the rain,* should *distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.* Peace and love are generally effectual to the accomplishment of the most valuable purposes; the sweetest melody commonly follows the gentlest and most delicate touches of the instrument. A wrangling professor, to say the least, is commonly a useless professor; like the high mountain, which though it be not indeed always barren, is yet generally unproductive of every thing but that which is worthless.

There are some christians whose conversation is generally dull and gloomy; this arises frequently from the natural constitution, and sometimes from *manifold trials and temptations;* and often perhaps, from a union of both these causes; but this is a disposition that ought not to be indulged. It is not indeed improper sometimes to converse about the difficulties we meet with in the path to a brighter scene, but surely we ought not always to bring them forward; we may mention the temptations by which we have been assailed, but we ought not to forget the deliverances that have been vouchsafed to us; the severe conflicts we have met with, may occasionally be told, but the victories with which we have been favoured by the great Captain of our salvation ought not to be buried in oblivion; we may endeavour to express the pain we have felt when we have mourned an absent God, but the pleasures we have experienced when rejoicing in his life-giving presence ought not to remain untold. Perhaps we may have been the subjects of many doubts and fears, but there have been also innumerable seasons in which we have had a pleasing hope that *our Beloved was ours and we were his;* we may have been *persecuted* by ungodly men *for righteousness sake,* but we have also met with a multitude of kindnesses from the people of God; our afflictions may have been numerous, but

our *strength* has been *equal to our day*, and the *consolations* of God have been abundant toward us; and ought these things to be forgotten? ought we not to converse together respecting them? ought we not to tell those around us, that we have found pleasures as well as sorrows in the paths of piety? that the one have greatly exceeded the other? and that the very pains attendant on a life of godliness, are greatly preferable to the highest joys of the men of the world? surely we ought; and he that does not, inculcates by the general tenor of his conversation, the unjust sentiment, that the services of religion are gloomy services; and like the spies, who feared men more than they feared God, bring up a bad report of the good land. Our conversation ought to be cheerful, becoming those who are entering on a world of eternal purity and joy.

Few things are more expressly forbidden in the book of God, than tale-bearing and slander; and yet few things are more awfully common among professing christians. It is an indubitable proof that the profession of godliness is far more general than vital religion, that there is reason in many instances, to use the words of the Prophet, *Take ye heed every one of his neighbour; for every neighbour will walk with slanders, and they have taught their tongues to speak lies.* This evil resembles *the pestilence that walketh in darkness;* the path it has trod can be known only by the awful ravages it has left. The slanderer would hesitate to take away the life of a fellow creature, for fear of the laws of his country; but, not having the fear of God before his eyes, he does not hesitate to deprive him of that good name which is far more valuable even than his life;—he would not readily (though a slanderer is almost capable of any thing) cheat his neighbour, but without reluctance or remorse he robs him of that which is far dearer to him than his possessions. The slanderer magnifies a small imperfection into a crime scarcely to be forgiven; praises a man, and exalts him to an eminence above others, under the specious pretence of honouring him, but in reality, that he may more effectually accomplish his malignant purposes, and be more readily permitted to hurl at him his envenomed darts. He is not a Christian who is not utterly ashamed of such conduct as this.

> The man that dares traduce, because he can
> With safety to himself, is not a man.
>
> COWPER.

Such an one has generally himself a very great paucity of good qualities, and cannot shine, but in proportion as he is successful in overshadowing the lustre of others. By giving attention to such characters, we are partakers of their evil deeds. If there were no slanderous ears, there would be no slanderous tongues, and the slanderer would be compelled to be silent, for want of some one to listen to him. It is a circumstance as lamentable as it is evident, that multitudes of professors will eagerly circulate a report injurious to their neighbour's reputation, whilst they appear wholly insensible to the guilt incurred by such a practice. Yet we are assured, in the sacred writings, not only that he is base who *raiseth* a false report against his neighbour, the same authority adds, that *he* also *who uttereth a slander is a fool.* It is undoubtedly to this crime that the Apostle refers when he reproves those professing christians who *are busy-bodies and tattlers also, wandering about from house to house, speaking things that they ought not.* Dr. Barrow, an eminent divine of the church of England, utters a sentiment as just as his language is forcible, when he says 'there is no great difference between the great Devil who frameth slanderous reports, and the little Imps who run about to disperse them.' The character of those who bring ill reports respecting their neighbours, or their brethren, ought to be scrutinized that we may be able to discern, as precisely as possible, the degree of credit that is due to their assertions. They are the ungodly *who whet their tongues like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words;* but good men *put away bitterness and wrath, and clamour, and evil speaking, with all malice;* let us imitate them, *that we may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation.*

Let it not be said of christians, that they are obliged to have recourse to scandal to enliven the conversation. If this were ever the case, piety must certainly be at a very low ebb. He who is at all accustomed to reflection and observation will never be at a loss for something to say that shall *minister grace to the hearers.* The wonders of creating goodness, power, and wisdom;—the glorious display that has been made, and which is still making in our churches of the sovereignty and riches of divine grace in the salvation of perishing men —the varied dispensations of providence to individuals, families, churches, and nations —the doctrines, the precepts, the promises, and prospects of the book of God— the life of our immortal Leader —our numerous wants and innumerable mercies— yea heaven and

earth appear to such a character, full of subjects on which he may incessantly converse with seriousness, profit, and delight.

It is matter of sincere pleasure to us that the practice of taking the name of God in vain, though awfully common in the world, is scarcely known in our congregations. Yet, through the power of former habits, and of surrounding examples, the sinful exclamations, 'O Lord! O God! God bless me!' and others of a similar nature, escape from the lips of some of our hearers. We intreat such persons not to hold themselves guiltless, since God will not hold them so. With equal earnestness we caution you brethren against using any part of the sacred writings for purposes of levity or jesting. You have long been taught in a Catechism, of which we cannot speak too highly, that 'the third commandment requires the holy and reverend use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works.'

All the religion which some characters possess, consists in applauding some ministers and in censuring others; at least this is all that ever appears in their conversation. Not that we mean to intimate that it is unlawful to prefer the ministrations of one person to those of another; or that we may not occasionally notice the excellencies and defects of those who are employed in the work of the sanctuary.—But surely you need not be told, that you may rapturously applaud some ministers or vehemently censure others, or generally talk of those who preach the gospel of Christ, and yet nothing that you utter may merit the name of religious conversation. Those awfully deceive themselves who suppose that because they are conversing about ministers, they are therefore necessarily conversing about religion; as well might they imagine that when they are talking of the servants of a great prince, they are speaking of the monarch himself; or that they are actually narrating the excellent qualities of an intimate friend, when they are only specifying the property he possesses, or giving a description of the garment he wears.

If we are what we profess to be, and are not basely acting a part, our conversation will certainly adorn our profession; as certainly as that a good tree will produce good fruit. We profess to have experienced a renovation of our nature; to have received, from *the giver of every good and perfect gift*, *a new heart*, and a *right spirit*, if this be the case, it cannot but be evident from our conversation; the subject which is

dear to the heart will be commonly on the lips; hence, if the heart be full of vanity, the conversation will be trifling and vain; if it be the prey of covetousness, the conversation will be worldly and avaricious; if it be a den of hateful and destructive lusts, the conversation will be unholy and impure; and where it is truly serious, the conversation will be serious and devotional; *a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things, and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth evil things.* Those who are christians indeed, have been created anew in Christ Jesus; their conversation cannot but be serious, pacific, kind, contented, cheerful, interesting, and heavenly. Never forget, that where God has possession of the heart, Satan will not, cannot be allowed the direction of the tongue.

Good men, we are told, walk with God; they profess to be conscious that this great Being beholds their most secret actions, and hearkens to their words. Have we not individually often appealed to the heart-searching Jehovah, and said, *there is not a word on my tongue, or a thought in my heart, but lo! thou knowest it altogether.* And do we really believe what we have so solemnly uttered? if we do, we shall *set a watch before the door of our lips*? we shall converse with our fellow creatures as cautiously as Latimer did with his persecutors, when he heard the pen moving behind the hangings of the room—as though whenever we began to speak, we heard the voice of some ministering angel, saying, 'Mortal! be not rash to utter any thing with thy lips—God is listening—he is writing thy words in his book.'

It could not but be highly beneficial continually to set before us the example of him whom we profess to love; our conversation would then be becoming the character we sustain. How full of simplicity and beauty, how full of every sentiment that can charm and benefit the heart, were the discourses of the Son of God. Natural objects seemed invariably to remind him of those immortal truths that cannot but be unspeakably interesting to all who ardently thirst for eternal blessedness. When conversing with the woman of Samaria, who had come to Jacob's well to draw water, how exquisitely and how successfully did he recommend to her the living waters of salvation. While listening to this incomparable Teacher, we do not wonder that his very enemies were disarmed by his wisdom; that they exclaimed, *Never man spake like this man:* we are not surprised that the multitudes hung

enraptured on his lips, *wondering at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth.* If we were often to ask ourselves how our Lord would have conversed, if he were in situations similar with ourselves, our consciences, guided by the unerring word of truth, would not fail readily to give us an infallible reply.

O Brethren, let us remember how guilty our conversation has been, and implore mercy. The trifling, earthly, proud, and passionate words we have spoken are innumerable. Let us each retire, and examine impartially what our conversation has been, and what it is, as members of society in general, and of the church of Christ in particular. O that the past may be blotted out of the book of God's remembrance, and that our conversation in every future period of our lives may be *as becometh the gospel of Christ.*

How vain are all our professions of religion, unless our conversation be consistent with them; *if any man among you seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue,* however great his gifts may be, or loud his professions of godliness, *that man's religion is vain.*

How injurious will our conversation be to all around us, unless it be *as becometh the gospel*; we shall be deceivers of souls; we shall continually inculcate the ruinous sentiment, that a man may be habitually trifling, covetous, discontented, contentious, angry, and proud, in his conversation, and yet be a christian; that he may converse as the man of the world, tread in the broad way, and yet after all enter into life.

How awful will our account be if our conversation be not as becometh the gospel. Jesus Christ has declared that *for every idle* (foolish or slanderous*) *word* that men speak, they shall *give an account* in the day of Judgment; and *behold! he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him* — 'the thrones will soon be set' — the eternal books be opened — and the whole human race acquitted or condemned;— the words we have spoken will meet us at this dread tribunal, and be swift witnesses for us or against us. *Seeing then* (to close with a reflection we have already quoted) *Seeing then, we look for such things, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?*

B. H. DRAPER, Secretary.

* Schleusner — and Bp. of London in loco

BREVIATES.

Tuesday evening, VI. Assembled in the meeting-house at Bampton, brother Draper prayed—brother Hinton delivered an introductory address,—the letters were read—brother Coles gave an exhortation grounded on their contents, and concluded with prayer.

The ministers and messengers assembled at brother Stennett's. The circular letter drawn up by brother Draper was read and ordered to be printed. Received a letter from the church at Witney desiring to be admitted to this Association. This request was unanimously complied with, and brother Taylor their pastor invited to his seat accordingly. Considered the case of the widow and family of our late highly esteemed brother Mr. John Smith of Burford, and unanimously agreed to recommend it to our churches and fellow christians at large.

Wednesday morning, VII. Assembled in the meeting-house at Coat for prayer—brethren Daniel, (of Burford) Kent, (of Abingdon) and Taylor prayed.

½ past X. Assembled for public worship—brother Alexander Smith (from Bristol) prayed and read a portion of scripture—brother Evans (of Abingdon) prayed—brother Elisha Smith preached from Exodus xxxii, 26, *Who is on the Lord's side?* — and brother James Smith from 1 Corinthians iii, 13, *The day shall declare it.* Brother Williams concluded with prayer.

½ past VI. Assembled at Bampton—brother James Smith prayed —brother Hinton preached from 1 Corinthians xiii, 9, 10, *We know in part, and we prophesy in part: but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away:* and after a short prayer dismissed the public assembly.

The ministers and messengers assembled again at brother Stennett's, Resolved, that it be recommended to our respective congregations to set apart Tuesday the 6th day of October, or as much thereof as may best suit their convenience, for humiliation and prayer for the prosperity of our country, the return of peace, and the general interests of

religion, and for united thanksgiving to God for the kind interposition of his providence in the abolition of the slave trade.

Brother E. Smith was desired to draw up the next annual letter *On a becoming spirit and behaviour in the house of God.*

Thursday morning, ½ past VII. The associate ministers met—brother E. Smith prayed, the ministers communicated to each other such particulars as they judged most interesting in the experience and events of the past year—and brother Stennett concluded by solemn prayer the engagements of the Association.

The next Association to be holden at Bourton-on-the-Water, on Tuesday and Wednesday in the Whitsun-week. Brother Stennett to preach; in case of failure brother Draper. A second preacher is chosen by the church where the Association is held.

State of the Churches since last Whitsuntide.

Added,	on a profession of faith,	48
	By letter,	3
	Restored,	1
		—52
Diminished,	By death,	14
	Excluded,	2
		—16
Increase in the last year,		36

*** Twenty-four members have also been dismissed from Shipston, and formed into a separate church at Eatington, brother Cakebread was, in April last, ordained to be their pastor.

Smith, Printer, Shipston.